

Oklahoma Chess Monthly

SEPTEMBER 2020

Chess News and Chess History for Oklahoma



War Elephants

CASTLES THAT MOVE

by Tom Braunlich

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- Bill Devin Miniature
- IM Donaldson Book Review
- Plus News Bites, Game of the Month, Puzzles, Top 25 List, Tournament Reports, and more.

Have you ever wondered about the Rook?

All the other chess pieces on the board are represented by imagery of living animated concepts like Kings, Queens, Bishops, Knights (horses) and Pawns (foot soldiers). They are all dynamic entities that have *mobility*.

But not the Rook; it is represented in the game as a “tower” or “castle” — in other words, it is a static unmovable thing. It has no legs! And yet it is one of the most mobile pieces on the board, second only to the Queen!

Why? We will explore the surprising answer to that question.

Spoiler Alert — it all has to do with a poet who liked the Cyclops, and an elephant named Hanno who lived 500 years ago!



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Don't get me wrong — castles are cool. Visually, the Rook and the Knight pieces are the two that attract the eyes of young kids to the game. The image of the castle tower implies the strength of the fortress, and it is thus a

pleasing shape — supposedly Bobby Fischer said he wanted to live in a house shaped like a Rook. Who wouldn't?

Still, why is a static image being used to represent a deadly mobile piece?

In most European languages this piece is named the same as what it looks like: a “Tower” — *Torre* in Spanish, *Tour* in French, *Turm* in German, *Toren* in Dutch, *Turris* in Latin, etc. (Russian is an exception. There they call it a *Ladya*, which means a “boat.” But that's another story.)

In English, this piece is informally called a “Castle,” but is properly known as “Rook” — which we are told derives from the ancient Persian name for this piece. And this brings up the first clue in our search to find out why the Rook looks like a castle tower. Chess is a game that is many centuries old. It has spread around the world from its origins, believed by most to be from India at least 1500 years ago. It is a game that had no single inventor. Instead, it evolved over the centuries until it reached its current sublime form. When you play chess you are actually participating in a ritual activity that our ancestors also experienced the same way, and feeling the same thoughts and emotions that they felt over the geometrical beauty of its secrets. You are connecting with your human past.

And so it isn't surprising that modern chess has contained within it vestigial remnants of the ancient game from which it evolved, and these come down to us in terms of rules, names, and imagery; some of which may seem bizarre or anachronistic today. And some of which came to us by a very strange path.

“If that had stuck, we might have axioms in chess today such as, ‘Cyclops belong behind passed pawns.’ and ‘All Cyclops endgames are draws.’”

The biggest change that occurred during the evolution of chess happened when the game was introduced into Europe, over 500 years ago. The original game from India went first to Persia, where it underwent some refinement and changes, particularly with the names. It is there that the King piece was called the *Shah* (their word for “king,”) and the term “*shah-mat*” (the king is dead) came down to us as “*checkmate*.”

Around this time the Persians were being transformed into an Islamic country, aligned with the Arabs, and it was during the golden age of Islam that chess prospered in that part of the world, and was spread to the west by Arabic traders. But it didn't go by a direct route. The Arabs first spread across northern Africa and across the Strait of Gibraltar into Spain.

It was from there that chess spread into Europe. But, again, this big geographical step for chess coincided with major evolutions in the game. Starting in the late 1400s, chess got “revamped” as it was introduced to Europe. Not only was the overall appearance of the game modernized, but also its theme and names changed, and even the rules themselves.

First of all, the rules were changed to “speed up” the game. Prior to this time, the Queen and the Bishop had rules for their movement that made them much weaker pieces. The Rook was actually the most powerful piece in the game. Because of this, the play was somewhat more drawn out than today, and slower-paced. Perhaps the European sensibility thought that chess was too slow, and there was a demand to speed it up. So during this time, the new chess rules, which we still use today, were developed. The Queen became the strongest

piece, and the Bishop also was made much more mobile. Also, at this time the Castling rule was introduced, to speed up allowing the Rooks to get into play faster.

The second change that occurred was with the “themes” of chess. The Persian form of the game now in Spain had elements that Europeans could not relate to.

The Indian and Persian imagery of the old game was holding it back in Europe. Thus, chess became transformed to better compliment European sensibilities, and in particular the clergy and the court. But who did this transformation? It had to be some people with enough “clout” to popularize it throughout Europe.



The Poet Who Changed Chess

We owe this change primarily to a poet named *Marcus Hieronymus Vida*. He was a scholar who enjoyed the patronage of three Popes during the years 1510-1530, and was an admirer of chess.

He wanted to popularize the “new” chess and to do so he wrote an epic poem about chess called the *Scacchia Ludus*. This poem had a huge effect on the transformation in chess in Europe from the old Medieval form into the modern form, as was Vida’s intention.

Briefly, the poem is about mythological gods attending the wedding of Oceanus and Thetis

— where they play a “live” game of chess. Vida describes chess in the poem with its first sentence, “we are playing an image of war.” The pieces are made of wood, but they “come alive” when they are placed on the board, and they get slain in a bloody battle, and are mourned.

Writing just 20 years after the new chess rules had been first introduced, but when they were still struggling to gain wide acceptance, it is notable that Vida uses the new movement rules in this poem, thus helping to popularize them. No doubt this was one of his intentions.

But he also is known to have worked hard on the new imagery and names of the pieces as well. The courtly European-style names of “Bishop” and “Knight” were used — but the piece that the Persians called the “Roch” (Rook), had a name with no imagery associated with it in European languages. It’s Persian meaning, apparently, was derived from their military terminology and meant “a type of warrior figure posted at the flank.”

So, Vida’s big problem was what to do with this piece for his poem. What should its image be to popularize it with Europeans, and what should be its name?

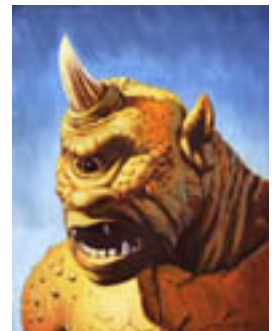
Vida’s solution changed the course of chess history, but not without going through some hilarious twists and turns.

According to an article by Hans Hollander, Vida wanted to choose a name and image that connoted great strength for this piece, as befits its place in the game. As a scholar, he also wanted something that would fit in with classical literature and mythology and thus made sense for his poem.

Thus, in the first drafts of his poem, he chose a CYCLOPS!

Can you imagine that? If that had stuck, we might have axioms in chess today such as, “Cyclops belong behind passed pawns.” And, “All Cyclops endings are drawn.”

And I could imagine that this



new Cyclops piece would look something like this:



Yikes! Fortunately, random chance intervened to change history, as it often seems to do.

While Vida was editing his first draft of the poem, in 1513 a new Pope was crowned, Pope Leo X. Leo was a fan of chess and great supporter of Vida's work. As is traditional, other nations sent presents and congratulations to the new Pope, and among these was an astounding gift — a trained Indian ELEPHANT, complete with its own *Mahout* (driver/trainer). The elephant came to him via Portugal. Its name was *Hanno*.



Hanno was a massive hit with the European public, who had never seen an elephant before, at least not since King Charlemagne had been given one over 500 years earlier.

The new Pope featured Hanno the elephant on

a three year tour of Europe, drawing huge crowds everywhere, most of which wanted to see Hanno at least as much as the pontiff. Vida was part of the Pope's entourage for these tours, and came to be very familiar with the elephant.

War Elephants

Hanno would often appear in "war elephant" dress, and introduced Europeans to the whole concept of war elephants. Although Hannibal had attacked the Roman Empire 1700 years earlier using African elephants in the army, the idea of these creatures being used by the military as a moving fortress was new to almost all Europeans, and captured the popular imagination of the day.



Elephants had been used in India for war, and there is a long tradition there, as well as later in Persia. *Alexander the Great* had to fight against them in Persia, for example.

It was the military equivalent of a "tank" of its day — able to push its way in battle into enemy formations, with soldiers on its back, spikes on its trunk which it flailed back and forth as it trumpeted out its roar and terrified enemies. Its body and face were often draped with armor-like coverings.

Even today war elephants have a fearsome reputation, as can be seen in the final battle in the movie trilogy of *The Lord of the Rings*, in which giant "Oliphants" are part of the combat.

One of history's largest battles — the Battle of Raphia in 217B.C. — featured a clash between Indian and African war elephants. The historian Polybius described it:



TOP
25

For SEPTEMBER 2020

Active Oklahoma Players

	Player	This Month	Change	
1	Advait Patel	2537	0	
2	Jeffrey Haskel	2355	0	
3	Howard Zhong	2307	0	
4	Tom Braunlich	2200	0	
5	Mark Hulse	2199	0	
6	Ryan Amburgy	2156	-3	
7	Anthony Paolercio	2080	0	
8	Veronika Zilajeva	2080	0	
9	Tom Patton	2077	0	
10	Charles D Unruh	2063	0	
11	James Long	2053	0	
12	Michael Nugent	2042	0	
13	Matt Dalthorp	2029	0	
14	Charles M Unruh	2024	0	
15	Chuck Johnson	2010	0	
16	Jeff Colbert	2008	0	
17	Stephen Gehly	2000	0	
18	David Luscomb	1995	0	
19	Joe Dean Veal	1941	0	
20	Charles Woodall	1937	0	
21	Paul Hodgden	1935	0	
22	Wayne Hatcher	1926	0	
23	Logan Zachare	1910	0	
24	Shaun Graham	1906	28	▲
25	Harold Brown Jr.	1901	0	▼



Player of the Month

Dr. Earnest H. Gill

One of the founders of the OCA and the OKC Chess and Checkers Club, Gill won the state title 70 years ago, and was better than Dr. Rozsa would admit! See Game of the Month.

"The men in the towers on the back of these beasts made a gallant fight of it, striking with their pikes at close quarters and wounding each other, while the elephants themselves fought still better, putting forth their whole strength and meeting forehead to forehead."

The Indian elephants, although normally smaller than their African cousins, nevertheless won this clash of 200 pachyderms. It is the only such battle in history, and must have been a sight to see.

For our purposes, it is important to note one key thing — *the war elephants had "turrets" or "towers" mounted on their back*. These of course gave the soldiers mounting the elephant a shelter from which they could shoot arrows and wield spears.

Thus, the concept of the war elephant that became a 'fad' in Europe included imagery of an elephant with a big tower on its back.

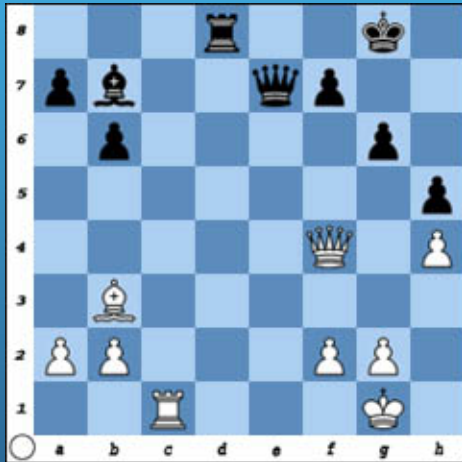
Like all true fads, it permeated everywhere in the popular culture of the day — appearing particularly in artwork like crafts and statuary. Pictured here are some examples from this era. Note how all of them show a large tower on the back of the elephant, often greatly exaggerated in size, and often made to look like the tower of a castle.



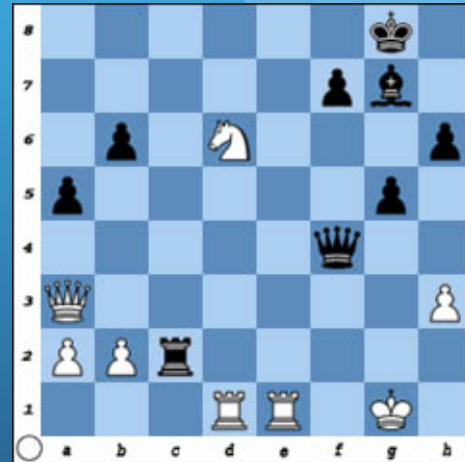
Example of the war elephant fad in popular culture of the 16th and 17th centuries. Clock in the form of a war elephant. Germany circa 1600.

PUZZLES

Answers Next
Page



White to move and win. (Easy)



White to move and win. (Difficult)



War elephant trinket from Faberge, St. Petersburg.



This famous life-size statue is in the garden of Barmazo in Italy, from 1547. Note the giant castle-like tower on its back.

Since the poet Vida was part of Pope Leo X's entourage for three years (1513-1515), he became very familiar with Hanno the elephant and the war elephant theme. Naturally, he decided to change his use of the Rook-Cyclops piece to the war elephant imagery instead, and his final manuscript for the *Scacchia Ludus* poem does so.

When the poem was finally published, it was very influential, and the change in the piece caught on; but still there was a problem with the name. Should it be called an "Elephant"? The problem was that the Persian version of chess already had a piece called an "elephant" (*al-fil*) which was the Bishop! And this name was used in some languages for the bishop (and still is today in Spanish). Although its name had been changed to mean "Bishop" there was still some confusion.

So at first, apparently, the new piece was promoted as using the old Persian name *Roch* ("Rook"), but represented by a carved war elephant, as in this illustration from 1616.

(See illustration next page).

Answers to the Puzzles

(1) The power of pins is nicely shown in the solution: 1. Rc7, Rd7 2. Qxf7+! Qxf7 3. Rxd7! (3. Bxf7+ Rxf7 etc. only wins a pawn for white, but taking the rook first wins a pawn plus the exchange, with an easily won endgame.)

(2) A classic combination by Milan Vidmar. Black has sacrificed a rook to threaten what looks like an unstoppable mate against White's exposed king. But Vidmar had foreseen that he can defend by counterattack!

1. Re8+ Bf8 (...Kh7 2. Qd3+ forks the rook) 2. Rxf8+! Kxf8 3. Nf5+ Kg8 and now just when it looks like White is out of gas he uncorks 4. Qf8+!! Kxf8 5. Rd8 mate.

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Tom Braunlich



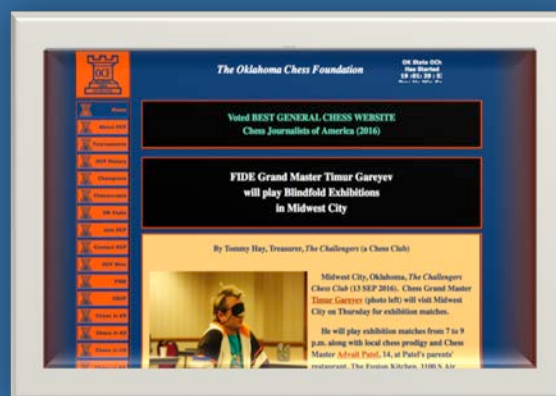
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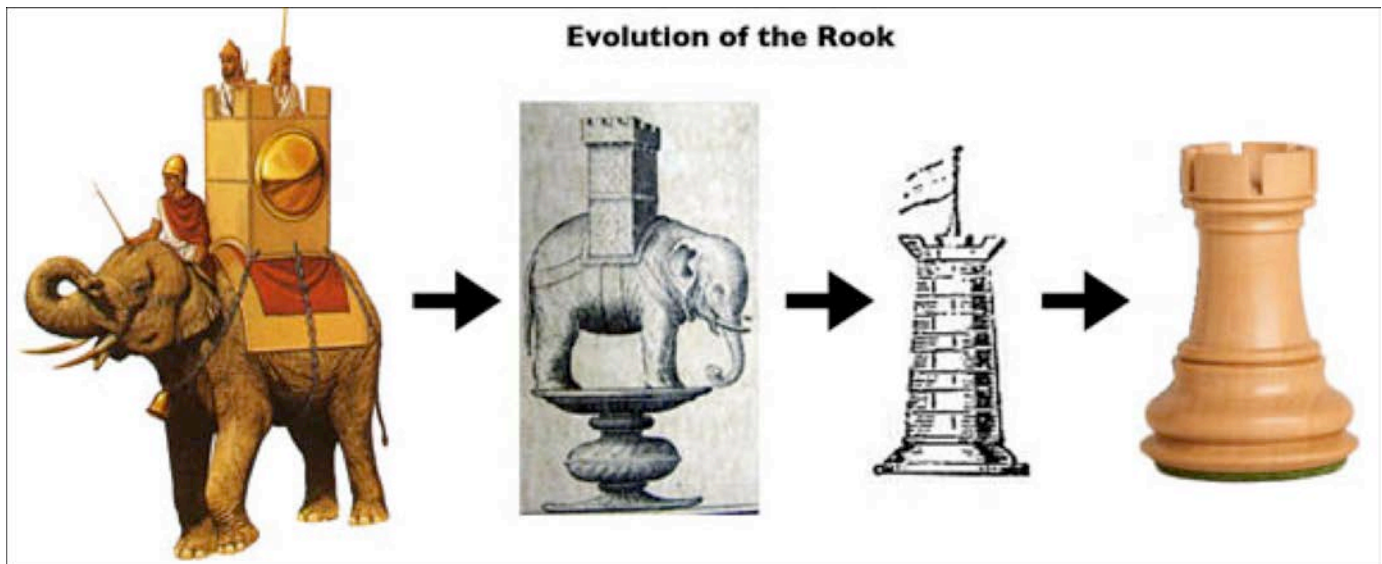


1" - from Gustav Selenus's chess book, Leipzig 1616

Illustration from 1616 of "Ein Roche" – the new "Rook" piece was portray initially as a war elephant with a tower on its back.

However, only the finest and most expensive chess sets of the day could carve such an intricate piece, and the ongoing need to simplify the chess designs to make them easier to produce as chess became more widely popular forced the image to evolve away from the elephant aspect of it, and toward the "Tower" feature alone.

Soon the chess sets were using simply a Tower by itself for this piece, and many even changed the name to match that as well, although English for some reason retained the *Roch* name, which comes down to us now as "Rook."



So, when you are looking at this piece in a modern chess set, realize that the tower you see there is NOT a castle tower. It actually represents the turret from the back of an Indian war elephant, thanks to a real-life elephant named Hanno who lived 500 years ago!

There is one final twist to the story, however. According to Hans Hollander, Vida and the other European fans of chess at that time were not aware of the Indian origin of the game. They only

saw the Persian version, which had evolved from the Indian.



In the original Indian game, guess what that piece which sits in the corner represents? That's right... a *war elephant*! Independently, the European revamping of chess had brought it back to the original image, if only briefly!



A Modern Miniature

Bill Devin - NN [D00]

Online 30-minute Game, 08.2020

[h/t Bill Sparks. Notes by Tom Braunlich]

This spectacular game was played online in August 2020 by Bill Devin, one of the strongest chess players in the state in the 19670s. He was known for his aggressive play, including gambit openings of his own devising that I hope to bring to you more information about in the future.

In this game, played at a Game/30 time control, he employs the Blackmar-Diemer Gambit for the first time. The result was spectacular. It seems to me this gambit is especially good for online play, where having the initiative helps with the short time controls. Masters believe it is unsound, but it does require accurate defense from black, which requires time. White can get a big initiative, as in this game.

1.d4 d5 2.e4 dxe4 3.Nc3 Nf6 4.f3 exf3 5.Nxf3 [For the pawn white gets vague attacking chances on the kingside, particularly down the now-open f-file.]

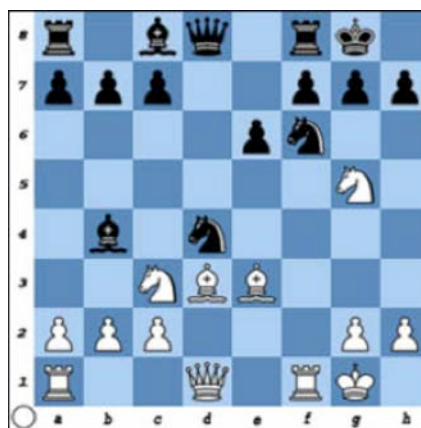
5...e6 [5...Bg4 is a common way to play it. A recent master example is: 6.h3 Bxf3 7.Qxf3 c6 8.g4 Qxd4 9.Be3 Qb4 10.0-0-0 e6 11.g5 Nd5 12.Bd4 Nd7 13.Kb1 Qe7 14.Ne4 0-0-0 15.Bxa7 f5 16.gxf6 N7xf6 17.Bg2 Nxe4 18.Qxe4 Qf6 19.Rhf1 Qg6 20.Qe2 Bd6 21.Be4 Qh6 22.Qc4 Qxh3 23.a4 Ne3 24.Bxe3 Qxe3 25.Qxe6+ Kc7 26.Rf7+ Kb6 27.a5+ Ka7 28.Rxb7+ Kxb7 29.Bxc6+ Kxc6 30.Qxe3 1ñ0 Pilavov,G (2605) - Zakharov,R (2256) 2014]

6.Bd3 Bb4 [The bishop may be missed on the kingside. 6...Be7]

7.0-0 0-0 8.Ng5!? [This is a typical Bill Devin creative to my mind! He dares black to grab the d-pawn and immediately begins a direct attack on the black king! White could also get good play with the slower-burning attack with 8.Qe1]

8...Nc6 [Clearly a key variation was 8...Qxd4+ 9.Kh1 Bxc3 10.bxc3 Qxc3 Here white has gambited three(!) pawns, but the computer nonchalantly says the position is dead equal in all variations! One line from here: 11.Rb1 Nbd7 12.Rxf6! Qxf6 13.Bxh7+ Kh8 14.Rb3! When it looks like white is winning.]

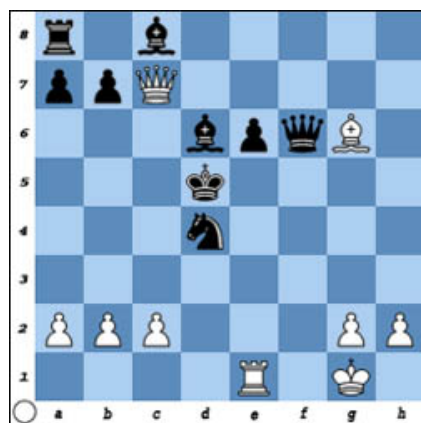
9.Be3 Nxd4?! [But this was the wrong way to grab the pawn. The key variation here was 9...h6]



10.Rxf6! gxf6 11.Bxh7+ Kh8 [Devin said that 11...Kg7 was better, but the computer still thinks white is winning after 12.Qh5 fxg5 13.Bxg5 f6 14.Be4 Nf5 15.Bh6+ Kh8 16.Bxf8+]

12.Qh5 fxg5 13.Bg6+ [13.Qh6 would have been faster.] 13...Kg7 14.Qh7+ Kf6 15.Ne4+ Ke5 16.Bxg5 f6? [16...Be7 was the last chance.]

17.Nxf6 Rxf6 18.Bxf6+ Qxf6 19.Qxc7+ Bd6 20.Re1+ Kd5 [20...Kf4 lasts longer, but 21.Qh7!



is murderous. Have fun checking that out yourself.]

21.c4#

Mate.

1-0



consist of 4-player teams who must have an average rating under 2200 (including a floor of 1800 for all players).

Matches should begin sometime in September. Plans call for all the matches to be streamed online.

Stay tuned to Chess Life Online for details on how to watch the games.



Oklahoma Team in States Cup

A new online event is being organized organically for a Team Tournament between all the states. Called the States Cup, it will

Ryan Amburgy has taken the lead of the Oklahoma Team. Players on our team in addition to him will be Tom Braunlich, Veronika Zilajeva, Matt Dalthorp, David Luscomb, and Joe Veal. Perhaps others.

UPCOMING TOURNAMENTS

For More Tournament Info Visit the
USCF Tournament Site:
www.uschess.org/tlas/upcoming.php

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Dr. Earnest H Gill (1900)

Dr. Bela Rozsa (2100) [E11]

1950 Oklahoma Open, Norman, OK

[Notes by Tom Braunlich]

With the pandemic still preventing new full-length classic tournament play I'm taking advantage of the chance to revisit some of the great players of Oklahoma's history.

Previously I have given some examples by Dr. Bela Rozsa, 12-time state champion. But this month we'll look at the games of 1950 state champion Dr. Earnest H. Gill, of Oklahoma City, who defeated Rozsa himself in this key game.



Gill was one of the original founders of the Oklahoma Chess Association (in 1946). He was always one of the top players in the state, but with this game he won his only championship.

Thus, it was probably the culmination of his chess 'career' yet Rozsa decided to pour some cold water on his victory. Dr. Rozsa often annotated games for *Chess Life* magazine, and this one appeared in the February 1951 issue, with notes that were rather dismissive of his opponent's play, making it seem like Gill played passively throughout and was getting outplayed, but managed to get lucky. It's human nature for a higher-rated player to feel that way about a defeat, but one normally doesn't say so in a national magazine! Although objectively Gill did play overly cautious early in the game, when he got his chance he totally outplayed Rozsa -- because not only did Rozsa make those initial mistakes, he also overlooked

many opportunities to keep mixing up the play. Thanks to computer analysis, we can see he was oblivious to a couple of fantastic counterattacking possibilities. His ideas fizzled while Gill shoved his pawns down Rozsa's throat.

1.d4 Nf6 2.e3 e6 3.c4 Bb4+ 4.Bd2

This move, transposing to the "Bogo-Indian" is considered by my computer to give white a slightly better game (+0.35), and yet in the database White scores poorly with it (just 41%). However, that is probably because the stronger white players don't play this line, preferring more aggressive possibilities (such as 4.Nc3 transposing to the Nimzo-Indian.)

Rozsa was dismissive of White's opening play saying, "Black's defense is easy in this variation." This is true, because it allows him to deploy the basic idea of the Bogo-Indian, which is to trade of the dark square bishop and then put his pawn chain on the dark squares (with ...d6 and ...e5, etc.) with which he will have a good bishop but white's light-square bishop is going to be 'bad'.

4...Bxd2+ 5.Nxd2 d6 6.Ngf3 0-0 7.Bd3 b6 [7...Nc6 is another way to play such positions, to support ...e5 and retreat the N to e7 if white advances his d-pawn.]

8.Qc2 Bb7 9.e4 h6

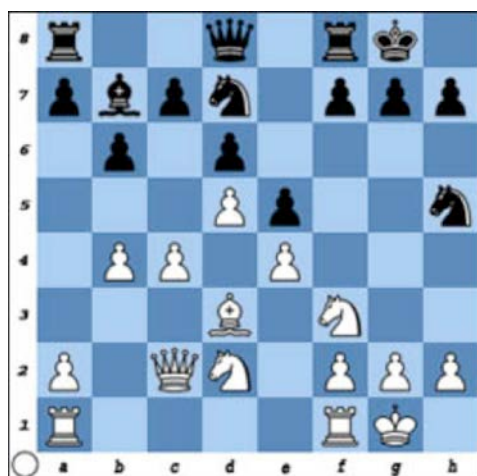
[A typical move from a higher-rated player. Rozsa was 2100 and Gill was 1900. Rozsa here plays a provocative move, trying to tempt white into the move 10.e4-e5, after which the game gets messy and he hopes to outplay his opponent. His comment here was that the move would "have possibilities. But it might turn out to be premature." Gill decides to just continue development, which is one reason why Rozsa later labels his play passive. But one could also argue that Gill was being prudent. The computer calls the position after 10.e5 dynamically equal.]

10.0-0 Nbd7 11.b4 [White starts play on the queenside. The push c4-c5 is now constantly in the air. Thus Rozsa hastens to generate play on the other side of the board.]

11...e5 12.d5 [Rozsa says, "This looks like a weak move as it immobilizes White's bishop." This is true. First of all, it falls in with Black's basic plans in the Bogó, the positional idea of him having the better bishop, as well as possibilities for a kingside attack now that the center is closed.]

[12.c5 Would have been more thematic for white. He breaks open the center by making the logical follow-up to his last move, and he threatens c5-c6 forking. 12...bxc5 13.bxc5 is simply much better for White, because if 13...dxc5 14.dxe5 is strong. Did Rozsa know this but not want to admit it in his annotations? Normally when an annotator points out a bad move he says what would have been better, but he avoids that here.]

12...Nh5 [Now Rozsa has the active kingside counterplay he wanted, thanks to white closing the center. But still the position is roughly equal.]



13.g3 Ndf6?!

Rozsa doesn't comment, but it is a very risky move as White gets the chance for the push c4-c5 again since the N has unprotected c5.

14.Be2 [Gill makes another 'safety first' move. Instead 14.c5 would have given white a serious advantage. Probably Rozsa was intending then to make the same bishop maneuver as the game with 14...Bc8 but then Gill would have had the strong continuation 15.cxd6 cxd6 16.Rfc1 penetrating down the c-file with a big advantage. 16...Bg4 17.Qc7]

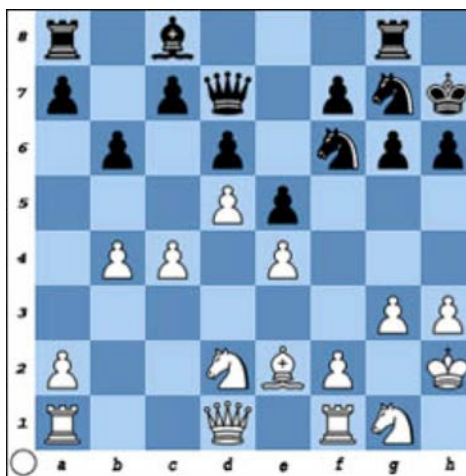
14...Bc8 15.Kg2 [15.c5 is still good.]

15...Qd7 16.Ng1 g6 [Rozsa says, "This is to anticipate White's next move and also to prepare the g-file for pieces."]

17.Qd1 Kh7 18.h3? [Here Gill really does make a passive move, and one which weakens his kingside. Part of the problem with being a Class A player against a master is that you are good enough to see his threats — including even threats that are far from being real yet. Again, white should not forget to strive for his own queenside play...]

[18.c5 is again correct, although black now has more options on how to respond to it. My computer likes 18...c6!? when things get messy after 19.Nc4 bxc5 20.dxc6 Qxc6 21.Qxd6 Qxd6 22.Nxd6 cxb4 23.Bc4= but note that in this line black's kingside attack is neutralized and his N on h5 is thus out of play in the ending.]

18...Rg8! 19.Kh2 Ng7?



Rozsa says, "This is not accurate. The knight on h5 cannot be chased away but Black was thinking about pushing g5."

He suggests, " 19...Qe7 should have been played first." However, it does not prevent the thematic move c5 either, which in this case would come as a good pawn sac for white: 20.c5 dxc5 21.bxc5 Qxc5 22.Ngf3 Qe7 23.Rc1 etc. with initiative.

20.f4

[Suddenly white gets aggressive, hoping to take advantage of the lineup on the f-file]

But it weakness more squares, and Qb3 intending to still play for c4-c5 seems better.]

20...Qe7 21.fxe5 dxe5? [Rozsa comments simply, "21...Qxe5 has its points and probably would have been more advantageous from a positional angle." Well, yeah! Taking with the pawn is a major positional mistake, reopening the idea of c4-c5 for White, which could easily win the game for him. 21. ...Qxe5 would have maintained equality. Note that Rozsa can't bring himself to say that his move is an obvious mistake.]

22.a3 [Here again Rozsa criticizes white's passive play, saying, "This is somewhat of an admission that White is just waiting for Black to make a move as Black certainly was not thinking of capturing the b pawn."]

[But he also doesn't point out that white gets a serious edge now with the obvious 22.c5! bxc5 23.bxc5 Nd7 24.Rc1 Nxc5 25.Qc2]

22...Nfh5 23.Rf2 Bd7 24.Rc1 c6?

Here Rozsa gives this move two question marks and says, "Completely overlooking the power of c5. This is one of those major minor blunders which one overlooks when one's opponent has played a very passive game all along. The move that would have stopped this whole attack was 24...c5 "

That's a pretty harsh comment considering he himself had made numerous mistakes. White's safety-first play might have been justified simply as a strategy, to entice black on and watch him self-destruct in an attempt to attack (even though white overlooked many chances for advantage with c4-c5). This isn't a case of playing a brilliant game and then making one blunder that loses. His move doesn't deserve two question marks, because he is still in the game and overlooks chances for counterplay later! From now on Gill grabs his chances and puts pressure on nicely.]

25.c5! cxd5 ["And with this Black's game collapses." Says Rozsa. White is better now, but Black still has play, as we will see.]

26.exd5+ e4 27.Nf1



27... f5?

This is perhaps Black's last mistake. In fact there is a complex counter-attack available to him here. We can hardly blame him for not seeing it, as it is a typical mind-boggling computer variation: 27...Nf5! 28.g4 (The computer lists many other variations, but all lead to just a slight edge for white, such as 28.Bg4) 28...Qe5+ 29.Kh1 Nhg3+ 30.Nxg3 Nxg3+ 31.Kg2 Raf8 32.c6 Bf5! 33.d6 (33.gxf5? gxf5 34.Bc4 e3) 33...e3 34.Rf3 Be4 35.d7 Qc7! 36.Bd3 f5 37.Bxe4 fxe4 38.Rxf8 Rxf8 39.Rc2 h5 40.Qe1 h4= and here both sides have strong pawns that lead almost to a kind of mutual zugzwang in the position, which the computer says is dead equal. For example, if 41.Qxe3? Nf1! 42.Qxe4 Qh2# .I think that if Rozsa had ventured into this line he would have had good chances to outplay his opponent in the complications. Instead, he allows white's pawns to roll, and Gill now takes over...

28.c6 Be8 29.d6 Qe5 30.d7 Bxd7 [30...Bf7 31.c7 would have been just too embarrassing!]

31.cxd7 f4 32.Bxh5 fxc3+ 33.Nxg3 Nxh5 34.Rf7+ Kh8 35.Qb3

Black resigned. Gill thus won the state title, his only one, but well deserved.

1-0



By IM John Donaldson

REVIEW:

The Modernized Reti **A Complete Repertoire for White**

One of the more welcome developments in the chess world the past few years has been the emergence of the Belgian publishing firm Thinkers Publishing (www.thinkerspublishing.com) which has come out with a number of fine titles. Rather than focus on its latest books in this review I want to take a step back and look at one of the company's early offerings which was first published in 2017 with a revised second edition appearing in 2018.

The Modernized Reti, a Complete Repertoire for White (445 pages, \$36.95) by Grandmaster Adrien Demuth is arguably the best book available on a sophisticated opening repertoire for White based on the first move 1.Nf3, typically followed by c4 and a kingside fianchetto. Note this is not an opening for beginners or even club players rated below 2000.

Standard chess wisdom holds that newcomers to the game should begin with 1.e4 and play open games where they can master basic opening principles like the importance of rapid

development and control of the center. These important lessons are not quickly learned by newcomers if they open with a closed opening like the King's Indian Attack (1.Nf3 2.g3 3.Bg2 4.O-O followed by d3 and e4).

Having mastered the fundamentals of open games next up for the improving student is playing 1.d4 and 2.c4. Here they are exposed to the niceties of positional chess and their understanding of the game becomes more well rounded.

What comes next? Some players will stay with one of these two opening moves, but others will branch out and try 1.c4 and 1.Nf3, moves that are quite flexible and allow many transpositions to openings that more commonly arise from 1.d4 and 1.e4.

Why would someone want to open with 1.c4 or 1.Nf3? Part of the reason for changing openings can be a desire to avoid hitting a brick wall, which explains the radical switch to 1.e4 made by six-time U.S. Champion Walter Browne after several decades successfully playing 1.d4. Browne did this because he was having a particularly hard time getting anything tangible against the Queen's Gambit Accepted, Slav and Semi-Slav.

Not everyone likes to have to learn a completely new opening system from scratch (this was particularly true in the pre-computer days) which helps explain interest in 1.Nf3 and 1.c4. By playing either of these opening moves White can sidestep the Modern Benoni, Grunfeld, Nimzo-Indian/Queen's Indian, Benko Gambit, Queen's Gambit Accepted and Slav. Note there are tradeoffs - for example proving a White advantage after 1.c4 e5 is tough.

Enter 1.Nf3, which stops 1...e5 and threatens, if you will, 2.c4. It is with this move that GM Demuth has fashioned an impressive repertoire with many interesting new ideas and analysis. The lines he recommends, with but only a few exceptions, do not allow Black to move-order him out of his repertoire. Having explained the motivations for this repertoire it's time to look at what's under the hood.

Both 1.c4 and 1.Nf3 can be met by 1...c5 which has a reputation for being quite solid. White has traditionally met this in two ways: playing in the center with d4 or on the flank with b4. Both have been well analyzed and White has had a hard time

proving any advantage. Demuth proposes a third less common approach: 1.Nf3 c5 2.c4 followed in most cases with 3.b3 and a double fianchetto approach. Here is one sample line:

1.Nf3 c5 2.c4 Nf6 3.b3 g6 4.Bb2 Bg7 5.g3 O-O 6.Bg2 Nc6 7.O-O d6 (7...d5 8.cxd5 Nxd5 9.Bxg7 Kxg7 10.d4 cxd4 11.Nxd4 Nxd4 12.Qxd4+ Nf6 13.Qe5 is unpleasant for Black) 8.d4 cxd4 9.Nxd4 Bd7 10.Nc3 Nxd4 (10...Qa5 11.e3 stops ...Qh5, prepares Qe2 and allows ...Nxd4 to be met by exd4) 11.Qxd4 Bc6 12.Nd5 Bxd5 13.Bxd5 Nh5 14.Qd2 Bxb2 15.Qxb2 Qb6 16.Bf3 Nf6 17.Rfd1 Rfc8 18.Rd4 Rc5 19.Rad1 Nd7 20.Qd2 a5 21.Rh4 and White had a nice risk-free initiative in Bernadsky-Borovikov, Paleochoira 2016.

This is but one example of the pawn structure c4 vs. d6 that crops up frequently in this book. It typically offers White a small but pleasant edge where Black is struggling to find active play.

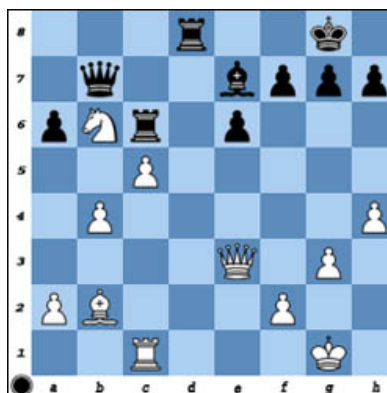
Here is another where Black prevents d4 by adopting the Botvinnik formation: 2...Nc6 3.b3 e5 4.Bb2 d6 5.g3 g6 6.Bg2 Bg7 7.O-O Nge7 8.d3 O-O 9.Nc3 h6 10.Nd2 Be6 11.a3 Qd7 (11...d5?! 12.cxd5 Nxd5 13.Rc1 Nde7 14.Na4 b6 15.b4!) 12.Nd5 Bh3 (12...f5 13.f4) 13.Bxh3 Qxh3 14.b4! Qd7 15.Qa4 Rad8 16.e3 with a small initiative. Ding used this setup to defeat Vachier-Lagrave (Grand Chess Tour Final 2019) and Kramnik has also employed it.

Demuth doesn't just advocate lesser-known variations. Against the Hedgehog, for example, he goes right down one of the main lines:

1.Nf3 c5 2.c4 Nf6 3.b3 e6 4.g3 b6 5.Bg2 Bb7 6.O-O Be7 7.Nc3 d6 8.d4 cxd4 9.Qxd4 a6 10.Rd1 Nbd7 11.e4 Qc8 12.Ba3 Nc5 13.e5 Bxf3 14.Bxf3 dxe5 15.Qe3

(15.Qxe5 Ncd7 16.Rxd7 Nxd7 17.Qxg7 Bf6 18.Ne4 Bxg7 19.Nd6+ Kd8 20.Nxf7+ Ke8 21.Nd6+ is a spectacular way to draw)

15...Ra7 16.b4 Ncd7 17.Na4 e4 18.Bxe4 Nxe4 19.Qxe4 O-O 20.Rac1 Rc7 21.Qe3 Qb7 22.Rxd7 Rxd7 23.Nxb6 Rd6 24.c5 Rc6 25.h4 Rd8 26.Bb2



Demuth likes this position for White believing his positional trumps and initiative are more important than the small material deficit. The silicon

oracles recommend 26...e5 to liberate the rook on c6 and block the long diagonal.

Note that Black can sidestep this repertoire with 2...g6, which does however allow the Maroczy Bind. This is one of a handful of times where the author points out the right approach, but steers clear of providing a line, figuring the reader most likely has prior experience from their days as a 1.e4 player. Another is 1.Nf3 g6 when 2.e4 is his recommendation.

The other Black first moves where 2.e4 make sense are after 1...b5 and 1...b6. Against the former Demuth sticks with the tried and true 2.e4 Bb7 3.Bxb5 but against the latter he has a little-known line to offer:

Demuth's anti-Dutch weapon is 1.Nf3 f5 2.d3 when Black appears to have one narrow path to equality: 2...d6 3.e4 e5 4.Nc3 Nc6 5.exf5 Nge7 (the key move) 6.d4 exd4 7.Nxd4 Nxd4 8.Qxd4 Nxf5 9.Qe4+ Qe7 10.Bd3 Qxe4+ 11.Nxe4 (as in Pelletier-Borisek, Zillertal 2015. Demuth believes White has the upper hand but after 11...d5 12.Ng3 g6 any advantage for the first player is very small indeed. Remember the title of this book is not White to Play and Win! Sometimes you just have to play chess and be practical. How many of your future opponents will know this line and what is it worth to avoid all the mainline Dutch theory?

Where the repertoire is not in sync is against the King's Indian and Grunfeld. Demuth proposes a double fianchetto line with c4 against the KID and supplies the following nifty bit of analysis.

1.Nf3 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.b3 (Note this move needs to be played immediately as 3.g3 Bg7 4.b3 Ne4 5.d4 c5 6.Bg2 Qa5+ forces 7.Kf1) 3...Bg7 4.Bb2 0-0 5.g3 d6 6.d4 e5 7.dxe5 dxe5 8.Qxd8 Rxd8 9.Nxe5 Na6 10.Nd3 Bf5 11.Nc3 Bxd3 12.exd3 Nb4 13.0-0-0 Ng4 14.Rd2 Re8 15. 16.Rf1 Nfxd3+ 17.Bxd3 Bh6 18.Kd1 Rad8 19.Nd5 Bxd2 20.Nf6+ Kf8 21.Nxh7+ Kg8 22.Nf6+ Kf8 with a draw.

Give credit to the author for his objectivity as he very clearly states this rather forcing line represents best play by both sides and that it wouldn't be a bad idea to have another line against the King's Indian. The Fianchetto Variation (1.Nf3 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.g3 Bg7 4.Bg2 0-0 5.0-0 d6 6.d4) would be a good fit for Demuth's repertoire, particularly variations like 6...Nc6 7.Nc3 a6 8.d5 Na5 9.b3 c5 10.dxc6 against the Panno or 6...Nc6 7.Nc3 e5 8.dxe5 Nxe5 9.b3 - both leading to the c4 vs. d6 pawn structure alluded to earlier.

The Classical (1.Nf3 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.Nc3 Bg7 4.e4 d6 5.Be2 0-0 6.0-0 e5 7.0-0 or the Petrosian system (7.d5) might be an even better fit as Demuth proposes the topical Anti-Grinfeld line 1.Nf3 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.Nc3 d5 4.cxd5 Nxd5 5.Qb3 and analyses it extensively.

If there is a fly in the ointment in this repertoire it is the response to 1.Nf3 d5. Just as 1.c4 e5 is a tough nut to crack so is 1.Nf3 d5. Early on Vladimir Kramnik loved to open 1.Nf3 and after 1...d5 would play 2.d4. There is certainly nothing wrong with this approach, but the problems of cracking the Queen's Gambit Accepted, the Slav and Semi-Slav and their accompanying huge bodies of theory remain. To this end near the end of his career Kramnik switched to 2.g3. His motivation was not the search for an opening advantage, but to sidestep theory and reach a complicated fight without early simplification.

Why didn't Kramnik play the traditional Reti move 2.c4? The answer is the space gaining 2...d4. One might think playing the Benoni a tempo up would be promising stuff but the consensus after many practical tests with 3.e3 and 3.g3 is that Black is perfectly fine. This

explains the author's advocacy for the wild and woolly 3.b4 which lead to sharp and unconventional play unlike anything else espoused by Demuth in this book. Those who like to play the Blumenfeld Gambit will want to give 3.b4 a try, but traditional Reti enthusiasts may be uncomfortable in the resulting positions which bear no resemblance to the fianchetto positions with a slight edge which are White's bread and butter when opening 1.Nf3 and 2.c4.

If you can get your head around 1.Nf3 d5 2.c4 d4 3.b4 then Demuth's repertoire after 1...d5 works like a charm.

After 1.Nf3 d5 2.c4 e6 White aims for a Neo-Catalan with **3.g3 Nf6 4.Bg2 Be7** (4...dxc4 5.Qa4+ Nbd7 6.Qxc4 a6 7.Qb3 Rb8 8.0-0 b5 9.a4 Bb7 10.axb5 axb5 11.d3) **5.0-0 0-0 6.b3**.

The Queen's Gambit Accepted approach with 1.Nf3 d5 2.c4 dxc4 is met by 3.e3 Nf6 4.Bxc4 e6 5.0-0 c5 6.Qe2 with the idea of temporarily delaying the d4 advance. Demuth offers the following line: 6... Nc6 7.Rd1 Be7 8.Nc3 0-0 9.d4 cxd4 10.Nxd4 Nxd4 11.exd4 Nd5 12.Qf3 with a nice initiative for White.

Who is this book for? As mentioned previously this is a book for more advanced players (2000+) who have previous experience playing 1.e4 and 1.d4. *Those who play the Reti or thinking of taking it up will find The Modernized Reti invaluable.* So too will English players who will find much of value (1.c4 c5 2.Nf3 and 3.b3, 1.c4 e6 2.Nf3 d5 3.g3 and 1.c4 c6 2.Nf3 d5 3.g3). On a final note one doesn't necessarily have to adopt the recommended lines in their entirety to derive benefit from this work. One can pair parts of it with an existing repertoire and still derive great benefit.

The author's enthusiasm for his subject is infectious and he communicates well with the reader in what could have otherwise been a dry book. I give the *Modernized Reti* a strong recommendation.